

Mayor Brian McMullan  
State of the City of St. Catharines  
Holiday Inn & Suites Conference Centre  
Friday, January 27, 2012

Thank you for the introduction. I'm pleased to be here today to update all of you on the current and future state of our great city.

First, I would like to thank the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce and the St. Catharines Thorold Chamber of Commerce for hosting this event and welcome members and special guests to this State of the City address.

I want to take a moment to recognize the St. Catharines City Councillors in attendance, and they are: Jeff Burch; Bill Phillips; Mat Siscoe; Mark Elliott; Len Stack; Dawn Dodge; Jennie Stevens and Matt Harris.

As well, our senior staff including: CAO Colin Briggs, Rick Lane; Dan Carnegie; Paul Chapman; Mark Mehlenbacher; Bonnie Nistico-Dunk; Shelley Chemnitz; Sandra Lawson; Nicole Auty; members of our Economic Development team and support staff with us here today.

Before I begin, I would like to play a video for you, created by Fourgrounds Media – a tenant of nGen's.

(Play Video)

It's an exciting time to be part of this great, great city.

St. Catharines is in the midst of a transformation - an evolution - that will put our city centre stage and in the spotlight.

As every day passes, we are one step closer to seeing our collective vision come to life.

The next few years will be filled with ground breaking shovels turning the soil, construction of state-of-the-art facilities and ribbon cutting ceremonies, right here in St. Catharines.

Our landscape is changing as result of unprecedented investments being made in our community.

We are witnessing innovation, future growth and investment because as a Council, and as a community, we decided the status quo was unacceptable.

We know that without change there can be no progress. And while change may be hard, sometimes it is necessary – especially if we want to remain globally competitive and ready ourselves for the future.

But before we look ahead at what is to come – let's talk about the progress we have made.

- We scored a real touchdown this summer with the opening of the \$3.8 million multi-purpose Kiwanis Artificial Turf Field which can accommodate soccer, football and field lacrosse.
- The Port Dalhousie bridge/walkway opening was welcomed by residents who couldn't wait to make use of this new connection. Enhanced trails encourage active lifestyles and help us to be a more pedestrian-friendly community.

- The Carlisle Parking Garage officially opened this month and has a number of environmentally responsible features that make this building much more than just bricks and mortar.

With our silver Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design (LEED) rating for the garage – we are responding to public demand for more environmentally responsible builds while also demonstrating our commitment to green initiatives

This 600-spot parking garage will surely be used by patrons at our future Performing Arts Centre and Spectator Facility.

- As for nGen, our hub for interactive digital media projects and business incubator, they recently invested \$3-million to expand their facilities which is helping to build an interactive digital media cluster in this community.

The number of projects being developed by nGen's tenants is amazing and cutting edge, and is creating a real buzz in the industry.

And, just a few days ago, it was announced that nGen, along with the City and Chamber of Commerce, will partner with Brock University for its BioLinc incubator project – an exciting opportunity I will speak more of in a moment.

St. Catharines is a diverse community of students, families, business leaders, and seniors with a rich, multicultural heritage.

Together ... we can make a stronger, more vibrant St. Catharines.

As a City we must work collaboratively; form partnerships with educational institutions, local companies and all levels of government – to set the stage to create jobs and prosperity for the future.

The educational institutions can ensure students are being taught skills to be job ready for tomorrow.

Businesses can help to identify gaps in their workforce and barriers to growth.

Government can provide support to foster these partnerships, help to strengthen our economy and embrace opportunities for future prosperity.

If all of you, our business community, continues to show confidence in this city, promote it to others and invest in your businesses – we can accomplish much.

I believe, we must not dwell on the past but look to the future and remain positive about what our future holds.

There is much to anticipate on the horizon.

For example, we expect the Kiwanis Aquatics Centre will make quite a splash when it opens this spring.

The \$20-million facility will feature a double pool design, which will include a warm leisure pool, and provides barrier free access for persons with disabilities.

It will also include a 7,000 sq. ft. home for the Grantham Library Branch with more program space and up-to-date facility.

Customer Service at City Hall is a high priority.

We recognize the value of our customers – the residents and business owners of this community – and we will continue to ensure we provide services in an efficient, timely fashion.

To enhance our ability to serve this community, we are working to develop a renewed customer service model.

A new customer service desk will be on site to help people get the information and assistance they require.

As well, we have purchased new software and currently reviewing the appropriate process, staffing and implementation of this new customer service model which is coming to City Hall in 2012.

That model includes streamlining services and completing our core services review.

To that end, we have hired a new director, Jim Riddell, for our newly reconfigured department which will make getting permits less complicated and more convenient for residents and developers.

Construction for the Downtown Performing Arts Centre and Brock's School of Fine and Performing Arts will begin this year.

The City has hired our executive director, Steve Solski, who is already planning for the opening of the 2014 fall season.

We fully expect once our performing arts centre is built - this facility will be a real show stopper featuring a unique design with 4 theatre venues in one complex.

The Merritton Fire Hall is a \$5.95-million project to replace the aging Station 4. We will have a groundbreaking this year as we gear up for construction.

On top of housing state-of-the art fire apparatus, personnel and equipment – it will become the St. Catharines Fire Services communications centre when it opens in the spring of 2013.

In the first quarter this year, we are hopeful that we will get the Feed-In Tariff (FIT) approval for our Shickluna project which has the potential to generate green energy as well as revenue for our City.

We cannot afford any more delays on this project.

We are confident that we have the support of the provincial government to move this project forward.

Last year, I also talked about another priority of mine, which is to consider the feasibility of a Black History Interpretive Centre. As such, we created the Mayor's Advisory Committee for Black History last year.

The committee has been dedicated to reviewing the possibility of an interpretive centre and ways to enhance promotion of our community's rich history.

I am thankful for their commitment and efforts. And we all look forward to their report to Council next month.

One of Council's priorities this term is also the redevelopment of 110 James and 68 Church. While our community is losing the NRP headquarters, we believe there is some potential for these sites.

With respect to 68 Church, there is some potential the site can be used for more mixed residential developments as well as include an updated NRP detachment and Provincial Offences courthouse.

As we prepare for the future, plans for these sites may also renew consideration for a downtown square.

As you all know, Council had a top priority for this term which has been headline news. In December, Council voted in favour of constructing a new spectator facility.

Sports and entertainment is not just about the quality of life for our residents.

It is a vital component in our community which will bring new energy to our core – the very heart of our downtown.

The spectator facility will be more than a home for our OHL team, the Niagara IceDogs

It is a venue which can host home shows, festivals, concerts, ice shows, and sporting events.

If we can draw more people to our downtown – it means business for our local restaurants, hotels and shops.

It means more dollars are being spent right here, in St. Catharines and Niagara.

Our goal for our spectator facility is to hit the ground running and begin construction in 2012. We may be ambitious, but our plan is to open this facility in 2014.

This spectator facility is one of the final significant pieces of the puzzle.

We have the foundation in place – a foundation upon which future successes can be built.

I am confident people will witness a revitalized St. Catharines that offers a high quality of life, creates new opportunities for investments, and is ... open for business.

And there are other exciting projects happening all around us like the Niagara Health System's \$759 million Health-Care Complex and Walker Family Cancer Centre.

Construction is expected to be completed on the hospital by end of November with an opening in the spring of 2013.

The NHS's Ontario and Queenston sites will be used for residential developments which will enhance those neighbourhoods and increase housing options in our community.

When it comes to employment, as a City we simply can no longer rely solely on those high-paying manufacturing jobs as much as we did in the past.

We are, however, beginning to see new clusters emerging within our community in the areas of interactive digital media, health care and bioscience, as well as arts and culture.

We recognize, as a City, the need to diversify, pursue new opportunities and embrace change.

Projects like Brock University's Cairns Family Health Centre and Bioscience Complex can present new opportunities for growth.

The complex will be completed this spring with occupants expected to start moving into the facility in mid-May.

We expect this project will help steer the city's future direction and, as I stated earlier, that BioLinc will act as an incubator for local businesses.

It will help to create new partnerships between research and the private sector.

It will foster a new cluster in advanced health studies and bio-manufacturing.

It will create jobs, new opportunities for growth and further supports our efforts to move into a knowledge-based economy, as well as attract young professionals to our city.

Along with the new hospital, and our educational institutions' programs in health care, we expect St. Catharines will see this sector of our local economy blossom.

On the horizon, we see the West St. Catharines medical building development will further enhance opportunities to retain and attract medical professionals to this community. The result is that our community will have the services it needs closer to home.

As for enhancing transportation connections, for tourists and residents, St. Catharines is focused on lobbying for year-round GO Train commuter service.

Just recently, I met with the mayor of Niagara Falls to discuss this very issue. We see the potential and agree – it can be done.

With the support of the Region, we hope to encourage the provincial government to put the wheels in motion and make this GO Train service extension a priority.

While still in the early stages of design, we are excited that the Region is moving ahead with its plans to replace the Burgoyne Bridge.

The estimated \$55-million project will serve as gateway and is an important piece of infrastructure.

Developments are happening throughout this community. What people may not realize is all the work going on behind the scenes and the preparation that goes into each and every project we tackle.

Revitalization cannot happen overnight. As a city, we are dedicated to bringing new life to our community.

And, I know we all share that vision of a vibrant future. Just imagine the result once all the pieces of the puzzle are together.

You will see an enhanced downtown bustling with residents, professors, students, and art and entertainment enthusiasts.

You will see sports fans cheering for the local teams and visitors flocking to our festivals and home shows.

You will see visitors stopping in local restaurants for a bite to eat or shopping at our local stores.

At the aquatic centre – I can imagine our local seniors, adults and youth going for a dip, getting fit or learning life-saving lessons in the water.

More young professionals will move into our downtown – as employment opportunities focus more the knowledge-based economy, our community becomes more pedestrian-friendly and downtown living more attractive.

That's why, as a city we were excited about selling three of our lots to Penn Terra. This developer plans to build up to 200 residential units to the core of our city.

People will have a reason to bring their friends, families and loved ones to our city's core: To downtown St. Catharines – where good living happens.

We will become recognized as a community that is evolving – a city which has changed the trajectory of our future and of our local economy.

We are moving forward and ahead.

These investments will strengthen our community.

They are the building blocks upon which future successes will be achieved. It's the strong foundation we need to encourage private investment and confidence in our community.

As for private investment, there is positive news in our community which truly demonstrates our resilience and ability to refocus during the downturn in the economy.

While there has been a major shift in the sector, manufacturing is not only a part of our rich history but still a major player in our future.

There are success stories of companies able to thrive in the current economic times.

While the \$480 million in investments by GM have already hit the headlines – I'm pleased to say we are revved up about the fact the company officially launched its powertrain transmission which is in production as of this month.

It's important that we recognize and support industry as they continue to be innovative, creative and competitive in the global market which was demonstrated recently by Dilts Piston Hydraulics Inc.

The company landed multiple million dollar contracts to produce a series of winches for one of China's largest ship building and repair facilities.

And – it's important to note that this company has also made a commitment to continue to support other businesses by using local suppliers whenever possible.

When it comes to the retail sector, Smart Centres has made a \$70-million investment in the redevelopment of a shopping centre and \$11-million to renovate one of the Wal-Mart stores.

With the right slate of new tenants I expect they will continue to attract for the shopping centre, this will be another success story for our community.

There are other developments happening in St. Catharines including:

- West End Commercial Office (Johnson Properties) which is a \$3-million investment;
- Mahtay Café and Lounge with residential units in our downtown – an investment of \$3-million;
- Calloway REIT Mountain Locks Plaza - \$15 million;
- Brock University International Service Building - \$10-million;
- And the recently completed QEW expansion valued at \$159-million.

As a Council, we heard loud and clear that residents and our business community wanted positive change: for us to make the tough decisions and invest in our infrastructure, in our future and in the people of St. Catharines.

We answered the call for change.

We sought out support from upper level government to ensure we were getting the most value for our money as we recognize the importance of fiscal responsibility.

The dollars we have invested in our infrastructure will spur further economic development and build private sector confidence in St. Catharines.

When private investors see the activity happening in our community, they know St. Catharines is Open for Business and look for their own opportunities to invest.

We can and need to play an active role in our city's future.

We must strive to become a community of which we can all be proud.

We want to lead by example. If you can imagine it, you can achieve it right here in St. Catharines.

Together, we must invest today to ensure a prosperous tomorrow.

Can we do it? Yes, we can.

And the best is yet to come.